



NOT FOR REPRODUCTION OR USE WITHOUT PERMISSION

**THE NEW JERSEY**  
**ITALIAN AND ITALIAN AMERICAN HERITAGE**  
**COMMISSION**



PILOT CURRICULUM PROGRAM PHASE II: 2005-2006  
*Italian Heritage Curriculum: "The Universality of Italian Heritage"*

## Unit Five: Second & Third Grades

### "Marco Polo – Italian Merchant in China"

#### Grades 2-3

#### Purpose:

The students will be able to:

1. Identify Marco Polo.
2. Track Polo's travels to Cathay and throughout the east.
3. Trace the Silk Road(s)
4. Determine what modern countries lay along the Silk Roads and along Polo's travels.

#### Materials:

- Internet access or copies of Internet documents
- Red pen, maker, or crayon
- Blue pen, maker, or crayon
- Green pen, maker, or crayon

#### Theme:

Historical tradition holds that the Italian merchant from the maritime city of Venice, Marco Polo, was the first European traveler to visit the Orient (modern day China and surrounding countries) and record his observations during his journeys. Marco Polo's journeys and accounts proved to be a conduit for Western Europe to begin the understanding that great and powerful civilizations existed in the East, beyond the former seat of the Eastern Roman Empire, the city of Constantinople. During the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Marco Polo and his family established diplomatic and commercial relations with the Mongol ruler of China, Kublai Khan, and served in the great Khan's court.

As an emissary of the Khan, Marco Polo was able to travel throughout the Mongol Empire. Interestingly, many of his contemporaries in Italy refused to believe Polo's tales when he first returned from the East. The impact of his journeys were felt later, when those who read Marco Polo's books began to seek opportunities for travel and trade with China. The famous Italian explorer, Christopher Columbus read Marco Polo's books and purportedly carried them with him on his own maritime voyages.

For more background information, teachers can read a brief account of Marco Polo's life and silk Trade Routes at the websites provided in the lesson plan:

#### Activities:

Have students read the article on Marco Polo or, present the PowerPoint Presentation found at websites provided in lesson plan.

- I. Emphasize to students that:
  - a. Very few western Europeans had ever been to China, prior to Marco Polo's travels.
  - b. The Mongol and Chinese civilizations were very unfamiliar to Europeans.
  - c. Back in ancient times, there was a "Silk Road" that had connected Rome to China.
    - i. The two empires traded.
    - ii. The "Silk Road" was a series of trading routes, over which merchandise between East and West were exchanged. Silk was one of the dominant pieces of

**NOT FOR REPRODUCTION OR USE WITHOUT PERMISSION**

merchandise purchased by the West over these trade routes.

- d. Over the years, the Silk Roads were controlled by Turkic or Tartar tribes that made European-Chinese trade complicated, expensive and sometimes dangerous.
- e. Sometimes the Silk Roads were open and trade was possible through Constantinople, capital of the Eastern Roman Empire. Italians therefore did receive goods from the East.
- f. The Polo Family was known as merchants of Venice, which itself was a prosperous, seafaring city-state.
  - i. Venetians were great travelers, explorers, and merchants.

**II. Present students with a map of the Silk Roads and Marco Polo's travels from provided**

- a. On an outline map of Asia, have the students draw the Silk Road(s) in red and Marco Polo's travels in blue, using the provided websites: Give students a modern map of Asia from their textbooks.
  - i. Have students fill in the names of at least twelve modern countries along the Silk Roads and an additional six countries along the route of Marco Polo's travels in green.

**III. Once students have completed the maps:**

- a. Have them explain their maps.
- b. Explain to students that the maps of the year 1250 were very different than the modern maps of today.
  - i. For example, Constantinople was the capital of the Byzantine Empire and the Eastern Orthodox Christianity.
  - ii. Today, Constantinople is called Istanbul and is the largest city in Turkey, a Moslem nation.